

BEST INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

WINNER

TRANSPENNINE EXPRESS

In early 2024, the TransPennine Express (TPE) train company found itself at a turning point. After years of service disruptions and challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, both public perception and morale among its 2,000-plus colleagues had taken a hit, and so too had customer confidence in the brand.

The government took over management of TPE in May 2023. With new ownership in place, it launched a dedicated internal communications strategy to refresh and strengthen the business.

Working with Leeds-based agency Definition, TPE crafted a 12-month campaign that focused on launching and embedding a new vision branded 'Together, we're going places'. The vision has four core values: Be yourself; Make someone's day; Raise the bar; and Pull together.

The campaign was launched at Manchester's Etihad Stadium, where 350 managers experienced an immersive event featuring values-based themed activities. People leaders took part in life-size battleship clashes, quizzes, collaborative discussions and group exercises.

TPE's creative approach went beyond traditional presentations to create memorable, hands-on engagement with the new culture. A comprehensive digital toolkit then enabled managers to replicate the



SHORTLISTED

- MOO
- Refresco x Benifex

launch experience with their teams, including event videos, step-by-step instructions, and imaginative team activities that mirrored the leadership event.

The key to this strategy's success was thoughtful adaptation to real-world conditions. Understanding that traditional corporate messages often don't reach frontline railway workers, leaders created engaging activities that naturally sparked conversations

and were suitable for busy environments, from train stations to depot workshops.

Carefully placed posters, bunting, table talkers and wall branding across offices, depots and stations helped keep the messages visible and warm. Every quarter, themed 'colleague takeovers' brought the company's core values to life through regional quizzes, videos and activities tailored to each site, encouraging genuine conversations among frontline staff. Additionally, a quarterly storybook and magazine shared inspiring colleague stories that truly reflected the company values, emphasising a 'show, not tell' approach to creating understanding and connection.

The strategy was very well received: 98% of managers found the leadership event useful, and 71% agreed that the values would improve customer and colleague experiences. Critically, 77% of managers successfully cascaded the vision and values to their teams, with 76% reporting that their teams understood how to apply the values in their roles.

Pulse survey results from March 2025 showed remarkable improvements. Employee engagement increased to 77% from 70% in March 2024, motivation to do one's best work rose six percentage points to 75%, and willingness to recommend TPE as an employer surged by +13% to 72%.

The campaign laid down a solid, lasting foundation for continuous cultural growth, supported by quarterly updates and regular colleague activity updates. TPE's ongoing commitment to internal communications through this comprehensive campaign demonstrates a strategic approach to transforming its culture, re-engaging employees, and improving the experience for customers.

"This entry stood out as really impressive", said one judge. "It was really well thought through."

Another judge noted: "This felt like a big cultural shift, at a point in time when the organisation was on its knees. Strategic communications helped pulled themselves up."